

3 The MEND Methodology and Agenda

3.1 Pre-MEND Perceptions

The findings of the *Deaf Ears?* Report were profoundly disturbing, all the more so because its promulgation coincided with the celebrations of the European Year of Music (1985). The suspected malaise in school music, disguised as it had been by policies of concealment, was at last made palpable. Furthermore, there was no plausible reason to believe that the situation in other branches of music education would be more encouraging.²⁰ The crisis was ineluctable and called for a response. Although there were isolated attempts to address particular problems from 1985 onwards, the perception gained ground that the time was ripe for a thorough, importunate, nation-wide investigation of the gestalt of music education to confront its debilitating demon.

3.1.1 Towards an Agenda

The author of the MEND report was the Director of the DIT College of Music at the time he proposed that the national debates should take place. He was deputed to lead the MEND Initiative and redesignated, at a personal level, Director of Cultural Affairs of the Institute. His brief, however, was primarily to organize, in a systematic way, the conduct of the investigation. The object of MEND was not (indeed it could not have been) to effect solutions. It was, rather, to re-identify, collectively, the manifold problems of Music Education in Ireland and to offer them to the whole music-loving community, for open debate, in an attempt to take the findings of *Deaf Ears?*, and other related concerns, to a stage where procedures for reform could be formulated, and relevant strategies could evolve.

The establishment of a forum for music education was prefigured from the outset. MEND was not to be a regurgitation of the *Deaf Ears?* published material but, rather, a quasi-public investigation into the pessimism behind its findings - something that had not happened up to that point. And MEND was (obviously) not to have an executive function but rather to lead towards it. The prime concern in the early stages of the Initiative was to ensure that as wide a participation as possible should be achieved, and, then, to rekindle public awareness, in the first place, of what the problems were and the gravity of their consequences. To obviate any bias in the perception of what the critical areas might be, a plan was put in place to involve the music educators (and the music education lobby generally) themselves

²⁰ For a summary of the problems by which Irish Music Education was beset see 6.7.9 (The State of Music Education in Ireland).

in an exercise of examining a possible agenda and prioritizing the most pressing concerns before the debates themselves were organized.

3.1.2 Basic Premises of MEND

Since school music education had been the target of the *Deaf Ears?* Report it was, as stated above, re-adopted as a major focus of MEND. It was felt that without this basic building block, all other provision would be contrived, discriminatory and elitist. Since the DIT was itself in the forefront of private (semi-state) enterprise in music education and educational reform, it was in a position to provide substantial intellectual advocacy in setting up the structures for the debates and in formulating the opening philosophical parameters. Thus a preliminary set of agenda items was assembled from the implications of the *Deaf Ears?* Report itself. This called for a detached and thorough search for what it is that music education in schools sets out to achieve. Subsequent events revealed how divided the world of music education could be on this basic issue.

Other derivative concerns were the interrelationships (continuum) between curricula at primary and secondary level, the quality and relevance of teacher training, the negative burden and artificiality of the practico-academic divide, the effects (psychological and pragmatic) of assessment as a tool, the nature of performance and its place in general education, and the recognition of the work of the private sector. The time had come for musicians to be proactive, to realize that there is a demanding world outside of music and that they would have to come to terms with its constraints rather than expect that it would accommodate their partisan ideas without question.

3.2 Methodology of MEND

The MEND proposal was ambitious from the start and was, therefore, resource-intensive. Once the main sponsorship of DIT had been negotiated, the project was guaranteed the long-term support to enable a wide net to be cast. It had always been envisaged, as the plan developed, that the focused participation of distinguished music educators from the global community would add lustre and effectiveness to the proceedings. But the intention to unleash the worldview on seemingly insular problems had to be prudently choreographed to ensure a phased effectiveness of its enrichment potential. This led to the first and crucial decision, from which the remaining methodology could then evolve. It was agreed with the sponsors that the MEND initiative could be heralded as a tri-partite enquiry, with a sufficient lapse of time between phases to facilitate a period of analytical reflection.

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This was to provide for the issue of interim reports and to encourage considered consolidation or reorientation of strategy.

3.2.1 General

In the history of the state, although there had been campaigns for a better provision in music education before, there had never before been such an ambitious enterprise in relation to it. There was reason to suppose that those potentially interested might be ill-prepared for the searching nature of the proposed enquiry and its long-term implications; yet without their committed and meaningful input the credibility of the outcomes would be open to question. Even still it is difficult to predict how effective MEND has been in stimulating a lasting awareness of the need for entrepreneurial activity from those with leadership qualities within the lobby. In anticipation of encountering a certain ambivalence in garnering general support, a *modus operandi* was formulated with a view to the active involvement, in the debates themselves (and not just as featured speakers), of leaders in the field of music education across the broadest global spectrum of remit. It was hoped that they would attract, by their very eminence, a participative, proactive and enthusiastic audience. This strategy proved effective; the underlying rationale was systematic, as the adopted sequence, described below, should illustrate.

3.2.2 Towards an Agenda for MEND

The agenda for the debates was an overriding consideration. It was necessary to demonstrate a convincing democratic spirit, from the very outset, in drafting it. It was therefore decided that a heralding one-day conference would be held to condition the prospective participants, and to explain the intention behind the main events. This was conducted by the distinguished British music educator, Keith Swanwick. During the course of the seminar the 130 participants (mostly professional music educators) were asked to consider a comprehensive list of possible issues in Irish music education, and to prioritize them. The response to this questionnaire was encouraging and workable; there was a marked level of agreement as to what were the burning questions for debate. The only moderation applied to the results was to place the final rationalization, in eight headings, into a logical sequence, so that the conduct of the debates would have a visibly plausible continuity. In the event, this agenda, although offered for modification, stood the test of time and proved to be a hardy irreducible which survived into post-MEND days as a statement of the commanding parameters of Irish music education.

3.2.3 Towards a Time-Frame for MEND

In deciding on the timescale of the initiative, many arguably conflicting approaches had to be weighed. It was necessary to stress the intention to be comprehensive and thorough. There was the need, first, to allow time, even leisure, to re-identify, simultaneously, the whole spectrum of concern, to present scholarly deliberations in relation to it, issue by issue, and then to debate it in forum; on the other hand the programme should be ‘telescoped’ to obviate a feeling of chronic futile debate and passivity. To engage and retain the interest of participants, individual events should be substantial and significant in content, especially since it was hoped to attract audience and speakers from the whole country, involving travel and personal expense over a period. Thus the convenience of sociable timing became critical, to justify an expectation of engaging the music-loving community widely. Furthermore it was desirable to adopt a mechanism which could psychologically benchmark key stage progress and stimulate a real sense of expansiveness followed by convergence.

In the certain knowledge that budgetary provision could be severely stretched in the process, agreement was successfully negotiated beforehand, with the sponsors, to allow the involvement, by invitation, of the international community of music education scholarship. Ireland had suffered too long from the narrowness and vagaries of post-colonial thought and the futility of a time lag in adopting new ideas, often when the promoters themselves had already superannuated them. It seemed timely to hear what the global philosophical, administrative and executive experts had to say in both general and specific terms. This suggested another strategy for flagging progression in the debates; it was therefore proposed to subdivide the enterprise along yet another axis - that of indigenous and foreign input – at least in the early stages. An exclusively Irish team would first define, delimit and debate the areas of concern; this work would form the basis of an interim report which would then be submitted to a representative team of internationally-recognized educator scholars. Responses in the form of focused papers, in the context of the thematic dominance of each specialist enlisted, would be elicited and would fuel the ensuing debates.

This process would be repeated before Phase III with the difference that the ‘faculty’ would then comprise a complementary array of speakers and panel members, drawn from Ireland and abroad, who could, at that stage, comprehensively debate the agenda with the delegates in its more refined, convergent and proactive context. It was planned to issue interim reports between the phases to ensure that the subsequent invited contributions would be cognizant of and reflect the progress thus far, and that delegates would have documentation with which to focus their intended participation more effectively.

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The logistic structure of the initiative soon evolved. It would comprise three weekend-long conferences. Because the agenda was heavy with (potential) detail, it seemed desirable to encourage delegates to stream themselves towards their areas of prime interest; it proved plausible to segregate the topics into differentiated families and time-slots that would effectively concentrate the substance and usable outcomes of each debate session while offering delegates a choice. All sessions would have an invited chairman. In order to safeguard the authenticity of the contributions as reported, all sessions would be audio-recorded for subsequent reference. In addition each debate would have an independent rapporteur whose function it would be to submit an interpretative summary, for the Proceedings, by adding independent thought to collective wisdom, while capturing the mood of each debate. The layout was carefully planned; in theory therefore it was promising.

The MEND, in the event, took the form of a series of strategically-spaced conferences and other events. There were thirty-four (34) formal presentations varying in length from 20 minutes to one hour. These were invariably conducted in plenary session. Thirty-three (33) debates took place, each timetabled for one hour, but these were streamed as mentioned above (trifurcation during Phases I and II; bifurcation at Phase III as the focus narrowed). The topics for formal responses were chosen (in consultation with the invitees) fully to explore the challenge of the agenda; these sessions were timetabled, as far as was possible, to precede the debates to which they were intended to act as stimulants. The details are as follows:

MEND Heraldng Debate – October 1994

As its name implies, this one-day conference (conducted by Keith Swanwick of the London Institute of Education) was to give information, set the scene, and work, by consultation, towards a suitable agenda. Approximately 130 people attended.

MEND Phase I – April 1995

During this intensive two-day conference, the agenda, ordered from the outcomes of the Heraldng Debate, was spoken to by an invited team of Irish music educators of stature. The formal presentations, which were specifically limited to Irish speakers, were intended to stimulate and focus the ensuing debates. The object was to expose, virtually simultaneously, the full spectrum of concerns in Irish music education, with their interrelationships, and to further validate the agenda. This was facilitated by the presence of a representative assembly of music educators and other relevant commentators. Some 500 attendances were recorded at Phase I.

MEND National Music Seminar – May 1995

This half-day seminar, conducted by Professor Mícheál Ó Súilleabháin (University of Limerick), addressed the specific problems and realities of Ireland's bicultural (as distinct from multicultural) music tradition. The question of the inclusion of native music elements in formal education was a specific concern in MEND. It was publicly acknowledged, by Ó Súilleabháin, that the invitation to the devotees of traditional Irish music to participate was a positive step in promoting mutual understandings and esteem, in educational terms, between general music educators and the currently coterie interests of national music, by whatever definition.

MEND Phase II – November 1995

This was the second of the three main two-day conferences. During Phase II the agenda and reported findings (Interim Report - Phase I [Document 605]) in relation to it were submitted (and had been in advance) to a team of international music education specialists, to achieve cross-fertilization with the global view. The intention was to keep the full spectrum of the agenda under review. All the invitees were personally briefed well in advance of their participation. All presentations were in the form of formal papers. The participation of Professor Marie McCarthy, an American-based Irish national with copious experience of the Irish music education scene,²¹ was specifically invited to achieve a pivotal and informed linkage with the inputs of the other speakers.

It had been unambiguously established at MEND Phase I that shortcomings in the Irish music education dispensation could be traced, in part, to a paucity of philosophical underpinning in curricular policy and decision making. Phase II coincided almost exactly with the publication, in the US, of David Elliott's *Music Matters - A New Philosophy of Music Education*. Since this work had been heralded as, and proved to be, a stated counterposition to Bennett Reimer's celebrated *A Philosophy of Music Education*, it was not coincidental that these two protagonists were invited to Ireland to inform the situation in the most provocative and challenging way. The input of the eminent American music educator, Professor Richard Colwell (New England Conservatory, Boston, Mass.), who agreed to act as moderator for the whole conference, was particularly fortuitous and added a valuable extra analytical dimension to the proceedings. The topic of Performance (Agenda IV - see below), which was to become a key issue in the final analysis, was ably treated by Janet Ritterman (Director of the Royal College of Music in London) during Phase II, which was distinguished throughout by closely matched relevance of the formal presentations to the evolving nuance of the agenda.

The Establishment of the Music Education National Forum - November 1996

It had always been understood by the promoters that MEND could do little more than begin the process of reform implicitly called for in the *Deaf Ears?* Report. The establishment of a forum for music education was therefore planned into the envisaged evolution of the MEND initiative, subject, of course, to a mandate being given (as it was), by the delegates, for this to happen. The inaugural meeting, held on 7 November 1996, was attended by Sir Frank Callaway, Honorary President of the International Society for Music Education (ISME, with links to UNESCO), by Professor Paul Lehman, a former president of the US-based Music Educators' National Conference (MENC), claimed at that time to be the largest national music education forum in the world (with 70,000 members) and by Professors Marie McCarthy (University of Maryland at College Park) and Patricia Shehan Campbell (University of Washington at Seattle).

MEND Phase III- November 1996

The intention in Phase III was to submit the agenda in its enriched and converging stage to a team of music education experts drawn from the global community, including Ireland, with the widest spectrum of connections to what were emerging as the commanding issues in Irish music education. There was the hope that solutions to some of the identified problems might begin to crystallize at this stage. As will be seen from the analysis of this culminating stage (Section 18 of the MEND Report), the quality of the presentations was consistently high and arguably lived up to expectations. Furthermore the highly controversial paper *A Book of manners in the wilderness*, presented by Professor Harry White, not only focused on the central nexus of the whole MEND initiative, viz. philosophies of music education, but injected itself, on subsequent publication, into the international scene, eliciting responses from Bennett Reimer and David Elliott/Kari Veblen.

Attendance

Phases II and III had approximately the same attendance patterns as Phase I. Roughly 500 attendances were recorded at each.

²¹ Professor McCarthy's book, *Passing It On*, is a notable contribution to the history and lore of Irish Music Education.

3.3 The Agenda for MEND

1. The Philosophical Theories. The concept of the state-funded general education system as enabler in music education. The segregated educational needs of composers, performers, teachers and listeners.
2. Appraisal of the music education network in Ireland as it currently exists.
3. The fractured continuum in music education in Ireland.
4. The conflict between the concept of the centrality of performance and the elitism stigma. Towards a reconciliation.
5. The Leaving Certificate crisis as paradigmatic flashpoint.
6. The role of National Culture in the music education curriculum.
7. Music at third-level. The professional training of musicians. The Conservatoire Aspiration.
8. The establishment of a permanent National Forum for Music Education.

3.3.1 Philosophical

This agenda may seem unexceptionable, typical and even adaptable. However, national systems of music education all embody nuances, at least, and sometimes significant differences, in the emphasis of their operating parameters, in comparison with others, that make each one unique. This is one of the outcomes of MEND that has a message for all music educators, but especially for those who may lean lazily towards the adoption of ready-made solutions to their problems, based on half-digested theories that may be divergent in the fundamental educational questions they seek to address. All philosophies have definable limits to the applicability of their idealism.²² Looking briefly at two lists of Irish concerns - those derived from the *Deaf Ears?* Report and the writer's own additional causes for anxiety - it can be seen how crucial it is that music education be guided by a philosophy that is sensitive to these issues in context.

From *Deaf Ears?*²³

²² It is sufficient to consider here the words of C.D. Burns in *The Sense of the Horizon* (quoted in Susanne Langer's *Philosophy in a New Key*, p5), who states that 'philosophers in every age have attempted to give an account of as much experience as they could all great philosophers have allowed for more than they could explain, and have therefore, signed beforehand, if not dated, the death warrant of their philosophies'.

²³ On closer examination it will be seen that there is significant concordance between this list and the MEND Agenda (e.g. continuum, performance, assessment, third-level training are common items) which was designed to be a more systematic layout of the problems for the purposes of ordered debate (3.3). 'Irish music' (ITM)

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1. There has been insufficient concentration in the implemented curriculum.
2. There are regional and socio-economic inequalities.
3. There are serious discontinuities between Junior and Senior Cycles.
4. Pedagogical approaches have been lacking in active music-making.

Additional Concerns

1. Interrelationships between curricula at primary and secondary level are compromised by differences in pedagogical approach as between child-centred and subject centred approaches, between mandatory and optional status.
2. The quality and relevance of teacher training.
3. The practico-academic divide.
4. The effects (psychological and pragmatic) of assessment as a tool.
5. The nature of performance and its place in general education
6. Recognition of the work of the private sector.

These issues needed to be addressed in seeking philosophical underpinning for curriculum as observed.

3.3.2 Current Music Education Provision

In any plan for amelioration of a flawed system it is, of course, crucial to understand the exact nature and gravity of the problems to be addressed. These are not defined by an undifferentiated collection of coterie wishes or grievances, but by their interrelationships and interactions. The salient features of Irish school music education, as reported in *Deaf Ears?*, were seen as being incompatible with any reasonable expectation of a satisfactory provision. The irreducible essence might be stated as a historically implanted practico-academic dichotomy, which is as old as the tenets of Greek philosophy. It is suspected that this may be a feature of many other systems and be very familiar to many.²⁴

was added and seen as a *sine qua non*; the need for a forum (Item 8) to carry on the work of the necessarily ephemeral MEND was a strategic inclusion. The list was not included specifically to draw attention to the lack of philosophical basis for curriculum; this emerged as an outcome of Phase I of MEND, as has been confirmed in the thesis, and led to the study which became its substance.

²⁴ This is evident, from the literature studied, in the putative MEAE/Praxial (practical) divide in the US.

3.3.3 Continuum

The fractured continuum in school music education in Ireland is a direct result, *inter alia*, of differences between child-centred and subject-centred education - between a junior cycle teacher cohort inadequately prepared (because of time constraints in their training) for even the most rudimentary of music teaching tasks (Ireland does not have music specialists in the primary system) and an academically-oriented senior cycle force which, because it is generally inimical to performance as an unfamiliar tool, has little appeal, judging by the dwindling uptake.²⁵ But although this fractured continuum was identified as the root cause of the malaise in Irish school music education, it has many manifestations beyond the interface between primary and second-level education. Continuum and liaison - between philosophical thinkers and educational strategists, between second and third-level education for aspiring professional musicians, between general educators and music educators, teacher trainers and teachers in the workplace and, above all, between the interests and activities of practical and academic musicians - must be actively encouraged.

3.3.4 Performance

The most crucial of all concerns in music education is, in the writer's view, the place of performance within it.²⁶ The issue of performance in school education is at the heart of the differences in outlook between Bennett Reimer and David Elliott. The writer is convinced that the lack of a clear national policy on performance training is evidence of chronic misunderstandings and misconceptions in relation to it, particularly as to its spectrum and its demands at proficient and expert level.

3.3.5 Assessment

The interface between second- and third-level education is a natural focal point of concern, for it is the stage at which most lose their contact with formal educational experiences in music. It invites not only summative assessment of what has been achieved in some 12 years of schooling, but appraisal of how the aims of that formative period have been met. This includes the pertinence of assessment itself as a

²⁵ This situation is changing according to reliable, though informal, statistics since the end of the public phase of MEND, but there is mixed opinion, as to its effectiveness, of the new curriculum in terms of enhanced real standards. This is a controversial area which is commented on in the appropriate place (see MEND Report - Assessment Section 18.5). At face value, however, a reported increase in uptake of music as a subject in Second Level schooling, especially at Senior Cycle, is to be welcomed.

²⁶ This is a subject of two separate derivative papers, by the author, to which the reader is directed. They are *Performance in Music Education* (Arts on the Edge Conference, Perth, Western Australia, April 1998; published proceedings) and *Music in Ireland: Performance in Music Education* (Thomas Davis Lecture, Music in Ireland: 1848-1998, RTE, Mercier Press, 1998), 87-97.

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tool and the refinement of the curriculum which should follow from the outcomes of assessment. Concerns in Ireland have ranged from the relevance of the curriculum itself, at senior cycle, to the standards expected in other subjects; to the social/musical needs of the majority being served by it (including management of the high/mass culture conflict); and to the interests of a minority who arguably have a right to expect their progression to third-level studies in music to be fully met by school provision.

There has been some disingenuousness, in this latter regard, within current strategies to reform the curriculum with a view to increasing the popularity of music as a senior cycle subject (arguably diluting its content), and to establishing credible continuity with the feeder systems. There has, on the other hand, been a laudable attempt to effect a better correlation between time spent and expected achievement, but this inevitably attenuates standards and threatens or reduces the relevance of school music to those who aspire to the profession, sending them outside the school system to ‘top up’ their skills. There is a realism here, however, not necessarily to be decried, for it highlights the need to recognize the contribution that the private sector makes to the total enterprise. And it continues, if accurately appraised as a policy, usefully to draw attention to the fact that performance, for those who aspire to third-level studies of any kind in music, is unlikely to be served adequately by school provision.

3.3.6 The Role of National Culture in Music Education

Ireland has a rich heritage of traditional music, which has recently evolved dramatically to make a significant contribution within the ambit of the world commercial music market. At home, it is (inherently) community-based, popular, freely available, but not generally taken up by the majority of the population as a serious pursuit in perceived educational terms. It is outside the experience of most school children. MEND attempted to focus on its importance and potential, and to examine how its intrinsically social character and informality might be adapted to normalize aspects of it into the more formal setting of general school, to expose children to their natural cultural inheritance.

There is a danger that this bicultural nature of the Irish music education dilemma may be overtaken and further diluted or confused by premature attempts to superimpose multicultural modes upon it. This quandary may not be peculiar to Ireland; it needs sensitive, pragmatic and even-handed treatment in relation to progressive contemporary music education ideas.

3.3.7 Music Education at Third Level

Although school music education was the dominant enabler identified by MEND as the focus of the overall enterprise, there was still the problem, for the organizers, of where to access the system as a total regenerative cycle. It would therefore have been foolhardy to have ignored the sources of educational provision, since it is to the training of professionals that the formative influences, good and suspect, can be traced. Invoking relevance as a criterion, and including all third level music education - since it is axiomatic that the vast majority of professional musicians teach at some time during their career - it is desirable that all musical expertise, right across the spectrum, wherever acquired and whether practical or academic, should have instructional access to general music education.²⁷

There has been a significant growth over the past two decades in third-level education in Ireland and in the number of institutions providing it; this drift has applied to the availability of music programmes, with a consequent buyer's market for those seeking them. There is arguably an over-provision (with a dilution of core curriculum) which has affected the very nature of the courses on offer as a result of the options within them. Although changes in emphasis are plausibly defended, the reality is that practical institutions have become more academic, arguably for the right reasons. On the other hand, traditionally academic colleges (typically the universities) have (sensibly, in their own interests) added practical modules, up to master's level, to attract the best talents, who almost invariably come from a practical background anyway. This system is overdue for rationalization, as is its total relevance to educational goals at lower levels in a national context.²⁸

3.3.8 National Forum for Music Education

Finally, there was a need to signal a plan (for continuity of concern about music education) which would stretch beyond the culmination of MEND itself; pragmatism and the bitter experiences of the demise of previous initiatives demanded as much. It was obviously necessary to have the need for a national forum endorsed by the participants at MEND so that a comfortable transition from one to the other could be effected, if that was to be the mandate.

²⁷ This collaborative method of music education is referred to in Harold Abeles's MEND lecture (MEND 302, Ref. III P ii) on *Philosophy as Basis for Teacher Training*.

²⁸ Professor Harry White's paper (MEND 308) deals dramatically with this topic. (It is also considered in the section dealing with the recently (Jan 2000) announced funding to set up an Academy for the Performing Arts in Ireland, in three locations. [MEND Agenda IV MEND Report, 400. Also see MEND 602.]

3.3.9 Resourcing for Music Education in Ireland – A Collective Agenda Item?

The agenda items might have been cryptically regrouped as a single item - Resourcing for Music Education in Ireland, which, in turn, could have been subdivided into its human and fiscal elements. The first seven agenda items clearly underline the role of teachers. The question of financial resources, for whatever purpose, may seem, both retrospectively and in the account of MEND as it was enacted, to have been underdeveloped. Item 8 (the setting up of a National Forum for Music Education), which was and is considered by the writer to be the single most crucial outcome of MEND, without which the initiative itself and its sequel would be still-born, implicitly signposts the campaign for resources which would become a prime concern of this body, if established and enthusiastically supported by the teaching profession and by other interested parties.